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LETTER DATED 19 NOVEMBER 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Subsequent to our previous communication of 11 November 1998 (S/1998/1060), I have the honour to forward to you, as a sequel, the briefing statement presented to the diplomatic community in Asmara by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea on 12 November 1998, concerning Eritrea's initial reactions to the proposals presented by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) team in Ouagadougou (see annex).

I am further instructed to communicate to you that, as described in our earlier communication of 11 November 1998, Eritrea welcomes the OAU's ongoing peace effort and regards the Ouagadougou meeting as positive in that it provided a forum for a better understanding of all the pertinent issues involved. Eritrea shall continue to participate positively in the process, and shall, as requested by the OAU team, present its detailed reaction to the points raised in the "Proposals for a Framework Agreement" in time to be considered at the forthcoming OAU discussions of the matter scheduled for December 1998.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea
of 12 November 1998

I wish to thank you for accepting our invitation to attend this briefing session on the Ouagadougou meeting held last weekend under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

You will have received the statement issued by our Ministry of Foreign Affairs explaining our views on the talking points proposed by the OAU High-level Committee. I have called this meeting in order to have a deeper exchange of views with you and to highlight the salient points in our statement of 9 November 1998.

1. The OAU talking points contain some new and positive elements. The most important of these is the recognition that the border dispute did not start in May 1998 but that it goes back at least to July 1997. The OAU has called for an investigation into the incidents of July and August 1997 and 6 May 1998 "in order to determine the origins of the conflict". This investigation, which Eritrea has been calling for from the very beginning, will be helpful in exposing that it was Ethiopia which provoked the current crisis by: (a) using force to create facts on the ground through its occupation of Adi-Murug in Bada and incursions in the Badme area in July 1997; (b) triggering the armed clashes through unleashing the first unprovoked attack against our units on 6 May 1998 in the Badme area. We believe that these investigations will be vital in illustrating which party committed acts of aggression and that they should have a bearing on the framework of a solution.

2. The second, equally important point incorporated in the talking points is the recognition that the border dispute can only be resolved through demarcation on the basis of the colonial boundaries. Again, this is a fundamental point which the Eritrean Government has stressed from the beginning. Eritrea's boundaries with Ethiopia are unambiguous as defined by the Treaties of 1900, 1902, and 1908. But the crucial issue here is whether Ethiopia respects these boundaries. Ethiopia's issuance of the illegal map in October 1997 illustrates that this is not the case. Its actions since then also attest to this fact. Eritrea has therefore asked for explicit and unambiguous language that makes it clear that Eritrea's boundaries are precisely those inherited from Italian colonialism.

3. Eritrea is asked in the talking points to show "goodwill" and redeploy from Badme. Eritrea has reiterated its call that OAU ascertain first the coordinates of Badme village in reference to Eritrea's colonial boundaries before pronouncing on "redeployment and interim administration". This is, incidentally, a simple task that can be performed within a day with modern equipment. The other related element is the issue of goodwill. Eritrea has underlined that goodwill has to be asked of both sides and cannot, at any rate, apply to relinquishing sovereignty - on however a temporary basis - to a foreign country.

4. Eritrea further emphasized that the call for a cessation of hostilities inserted as the first point in the document be implemented through an agreement signed by both parties at the Ouagadougou meeting. But this was rejected by the Ethiopian side.

These are the main points that Eritrea requested to be incorporated in a viable framework of a peaceful solution. We have also asked that the record on the deportation of civilians be put straight inasmuch as it is inserted in the talking points. In the end, the OAU High-level Committee informed us that these issues will be discussed at the next meeting of the Central Organ, scheduled in December 1998, and asked both sides "to communicate (to it) subsequently their definitive response".

I hope that this brief overview is useful in giving you a picture of what transpired in Ouagadougou and what we can expect in the period ahead. I shall be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.